

MOSEP WP3 Submodule 2

How to support pupils in reflection and communication?

(Theoretical input)

The objectives of this module are that participants will be able to:

- Explain, develop and apply strategies to stimulate learners to reflect on their own learning process/progress.
- Explain, develop and apply strategies to support learners in recording and structuring reflection (questioning).
- Have an understanding of appropriate methods and formats of documenting reflection
- Provide critical feedback to learners and assist learners in providing critical feedback to peers
- Develop guidance on different levels of reflection: self-reflection, reflection for/with peers, reflection for/with tutors
- Reflect on their own work and practice.
- Consider how the learning environment affects the students ability to reflect in a self confident way

Reflection is what allows us to learn from our experiences: it is an assessment of where we have been and where we want to go next.

Kenneth Wolf

1. Reflection: the foundation of purposeful learning

There are many definitions of reflection, most however agree that it is an active, conscious process. Reflection is often initiated when the individual practitioner encounters some problematic aspect of practice and attempts to make sense of it.

Reflection is an active process of witnessing one's own experience in order to take a closer look at it, sometimes to direct attention to it briefly, but often to explore it in greater depth. This can be done in the midst of an activity or as an activity in itself. The key to reflection is learning how to take perspective on one's own actions and experience—in other words, to examine that experience rather than just living it. By developing the ability to explore and be curious about our own experience and actions, we suddenly open up the possibilities of purposeful learning—derived not from books or experts, but from our work and our lives. This is the purpose of reflection: to allow the possibility of learning through experience, whether that is the experience of a meeting, a project, a disaster, a success, a relationship, or any other internal or external event, before, during or after it has occurred.

What is involved in reflection?

When we use the word 'reflection' we usually want to describe a process of thought that is active and careful. It is an activity in which people 'recapture experience', mull it over and evaluate it. It involves three aspects:

- **Returning to experience** - that is to say recalling or detailing salient events.

- **Connecting with feelings** - this has two aspects: using helpful feelings and removing or containing obstructive ones.

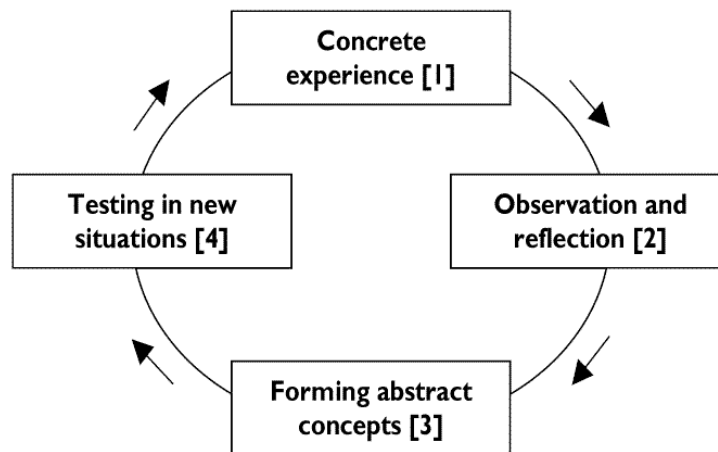
- **Evaluating experience** - this involves re-examining experience in the light of one's aims and knowledge. It also entails integrating this new knowledge into one's conceptual framework.

An essential part of the task of informal educators is to foster environments in which people can look to their experiences. To do this we also need to look to our own.

2. The role of reflection in the learning process. Learning from experience

A well-known way of describing experiential learning takes the form of a circle (David Kolb's famous circle of learning.)

Experiential learning (after Lewin and Kolb)



This diagram is a version of one included in David Kolb (1984) *Experiential Learning*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

The process begins with a person carrying out an action and then seeing the effect of the action on and in the situation. Following this, a second step is to understand these effects in the situation. This is so that if the same action were taken in similar circumstances it would be possible to anticipate what would follow from the action. In the third step these observations and reflections are then brought together into a 'theory' from which new implications for action can be worked out. The last step is then to use the 'theory' as a guide to acting in a new situation.

Concrete experience is used to validate and test abstract concepts or 'theories'. This is made possible by feedback from the situation. Here these steps are shown as a circular movement. In reality, these things may be happening all at once. Furthermore, if learning has taken place then, as Kurt Lewin put it, such a process could be seen as a spiral of steps, 'each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action.'

3. Reflection in the ePortfolio development process.

Portfolio started out as a tool for improving the assessment of students, but has evolved to be a pedagogical tool with many employments. Digital portfolio is a means to support learning in a digital environment for both students and teachers. The original idea of portfolio is expanded, and digital portfolio became a tool for enhancing communication and collaboration, and for sharing experiences and resources.

Portfolios are student centred rather than teacher-created. This allows the students to take an active part in the evaluation process and incorporate it into the learning experience.

- **ePortfolio as a means to create learning environments that are open, collaborative and support continuous learning.**

As learning gradually is moving to the digital world, there is a growing need for rethinking theories of learning and for changing of educational practice. A digital environment has different characteristics than a physical environment and provides a different set of educational possibilities.

Further there is a need for new educational concepts that support the learning demands of a late modern society. There is a need for means that supports learning as an experiential, self-guided, and lifelong process that is situated in social contexts.

It is in this light the concept of digital portfolio is an innovative educational tool. It is a means to create learning environments and educational communities that are open, collaborative and support continuous learning.

Portfolios are well known from artistic-like professions such as designers, architects, and painters. It is a folder containing previous works, a showcase demonstrating a person's skills and professional development, used when applying for jobs, financial support etc. It is lately that several educational institutions have adopted the concept of portfolio, using it as a tool for collecting and documenting the work of students. It has been motivated by the search for new and improved methods for assessment that goes beyond testing (Niguidula 1993, Leeman 1998).

- **Reflection aspect of ePortfolio**

The reflection aspect of a portfolio is in many ways the most important part of the process. Students are given the opportunity to look back at their work and see the changes that have occurred as they develop over time. Students also need the most guidance from the teacher during the reflection process and the resulting actions prompted by the process. It is at this point that students look critically at their own work and decide whether or not each individual piece is representative of the student's knowledge, skills, and abilities as a whole.

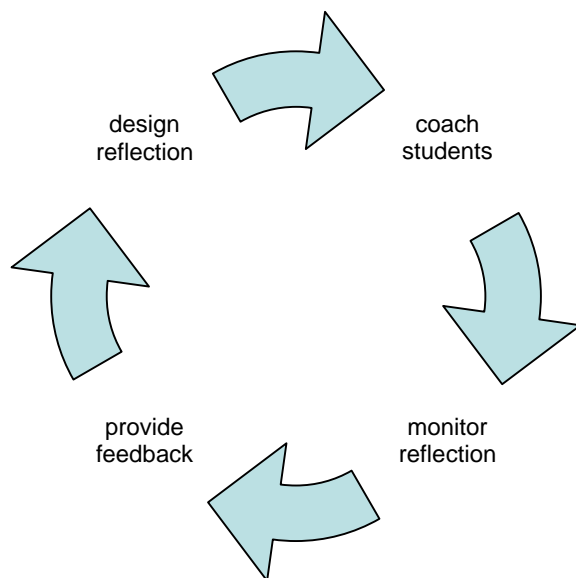
During the reflection process students are expected to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each item in the portfolio. It is at this time that goals can be set for future projects but also areas of weakness can be addressed. Because the portfolio is always changing as students select which products to include it is important to record reflections and maintain a log either in the portfolio or in a separate journal. These reflections allow the teacher insight into why particular pieces have been chosen for the portfolio, the reasoning behind the choices, and, when items are removed from the portfolio it allows for explanation for the removal or exclusion.

Teachers can assist students in the reflection process by building a scaffolding that allows for reflection and self-evaluation. Such a scaffolding takes time and effort with the class as a whole but is very worthwhile in the long run. Tools that can assist with reflection are guided questions

about the specific contents of the portfolio, rating scales on which the student can score each piece in the portfolio in terms of why it is there and what it shows, and individual interviews with students during which he or she can explain choices made regarding the portfolio and the ultimate objective for that portfolio.

4. What is the role of teachers in reflection?

The following diagram assists better understanding of the role of teachers in the process of reflection.



A key role for teachers involves **designing appropriate reflection activities**. They must also decide on appropriate ways teachers must devise ways to integrate reflection activities with other portfolio/course activities.

A second key role of teachers involves **coaching students**. Coaching during reflection can help promote effective service and enhance student learning. In addition to concepts and guidelines learned in the classroom, students need additional skills related to information gathering, problem-framing, and problem-resolution. Students cannot learn such problem-solving skills simply by being 'told' by an instructor. These skills are better learned by active participation and by teachers coaching. Teachers can coach by modeling practice, giving suggestions and examples, providing feedback and asking questions. Teachers can also provide tips and advice to help students avoid pitfalls.

Finally, the effectiveness of reflection in enhancing portfolio quality and in promoting learning depends on continuous feedback. **Monitoring student reflection** also helps teachers in enhancing the reflection process over time. In addition, portfolio quality and learning can be

enhanced by student **feedback** which in turn can depend on the communication environment that the teacher has facilitated.

- **Requisites for effective reflection**

1. **Outcomes** must be specified precisely. If outcomes are specified too broadly it may be difficult to devise appropriate reflection activities and to develop appropriate assessment techniques.

2. Before designing reflection, teachers must select appropriate **reflective activities** and consider the question: How can reflection be used to enhance a particular outcome?

3. Finally, teachers must consider how the outcomes will be **assessed**.

- **How to design effective reflection?**

This section summarizes key principles that teachers can use as a starting point for the design of reflection.

In order to design an effective reflection process, teachers must address the question: How can reflection contribute to effective learning? The following principles below can help teachers in enhancing the quality of student learning through reflection.

- Challenging: Portfolio development should challenge students to think in new ways, raise new questions, and explore new ways of problem-solving. By encouraging students to explore issues more deeply and to think about issues and solutions they may not have considered, faculty can enhance students' problem-solving efforts as well as the resulting learning.
- Coaching: Teachers should challenge students while simultaneously providing support and creating a 'safe' environment--one where students are confident that their contributions and feelings will be respected. Continuous reflection facilitates the faculty coaching role by providing portfolio related information in a timely manner.
- Contextualized: Teachers can enhance the effectiveness and quality of portfolio by ensuring that reflection activities are appropriate for its context. Teachers should consider factors such as student knowledge and attitudes, community needs, and course objectives and constraints in designing the reflection process.
- Communication: Reflection activities should provide opportunities for communication with peers. Communication with peers can also enhance student learning by exposing students to multiple perspectives.

5. Reflective activities

A variety of activities can be used to facilitate student reflection. Teachers can require students to keep journals, encourage students to publicly discuss their service experiences and the learning that ensued, and require students to prepare reports to demonstrate their learning. When constructing the reflection activities teachers should consider the following:

- Reflection activities should involve individual learners and address interactions with peers.
- Students with different learning styles may prefer different types of activities. Faculty should select a range of reflective activities to meet the needs of different learners.
- Different types of reflection activities may be appropriate at different stages of the development of the portfolio.

- Reflection activities can involve reading, writing, doing and storytelling.

Some examples of reflective activities are briefly described below:

Case studies	Assign case-studies to help students think about what to expect from the portfolio.
Journals	<p>Ask students to record thoughts, observations, feelings, activities and questions in a journal throughout the course. The most common form of journals are free form journals. The journal should be started early in the project and students should make frequent entries. Explain benefits of journals to students such as enhancing observational skills, exploring feelings, assessing progress and enhancing communication skills.</p> <p>Teachers should provide feedback by responding to journals, class discussions of issue/ questions raised in journals or further assignments based on journal entries.</p>
Structured journals	Use structured journals to direct student attention to important issues/ questions and to connect their experience to classwork. A structured journal provides prompts to guide the reflective process. Some parts of the journal may focus on affective dimensions while others relate to problem-solving activities.
Team journal	Use a team journal to promote interaction between students. They can take turns recording shared and individual experiences, reactions and observations, and responses to each others entries.
Critical incidents journal	Ask students to record a critical incident for each week. The critical incident refers to events in which a decision was made, a conflict occurred, a problem resolved. The critical incident journal provides a systematic way for students to communicate problems and challenges involved in working with the community and with their team.
Papers	Ask students to write an integrative paper on the service project. Journals and other products can serve as the building blocks for developing the final paper.
Discussions	Encourage formal/informal discussions to introduce students to different perspectives and to challenge students to think critically about the project.
Presentations	Ask student(s) to present their experience and discuss it in terms of concepts/theories discussed in class.
Interviews	Interview students on experiences and the learning that occurred in these experiences.

- **Practicing Reflection: how often, how much and why**

Reflective practice is simply creating a habit, structure, or routine around examining experience. A practice for reflection can vary in terms of *how often*, *how much*, and *why* reflection gets done. At one end of the spectrum, a work group could go on an extended retreat after a long period and could spend a great deal of time documenting and analyzing the learning that has emerged since it last took the time to stop and deeply examine its work. At the other end, a person could reflect very frequently, bringing a high level of awareness to her thoughts and actions, but rarely stopping to look across what she has noticed to consider what could be learned by exploring her patterns of thinking across different situations. This spectrum hints at the many diverse ways that reflective practice can be structured. Reflection can be practiced at different frequencies: every day, at long intervals of months or years, and everything in between. Reflection can also vary in depth—from simply noticing present experience to deep examination of past events—as well as in the numerous purposes it can serve, such as examining patterns of thinking, documenting learning, realigning daily activity with deeper values, developing shared thinking, and many other objectives.

Designing a practice of reflection means both clarifying the purposes it needs to serve and identifying opportunities to locate reflection in our work that are realistic and yet occur at the right intervals and with sufficient depth to be meaningful. Maintaining a practice of reflection, however it is structured, transforms the possibility of learning from our work into a reality.

- **Reflection with peers vs. individual reflective practice**

If reflective practice “illuminates what the self and others have experienced” is this an individual or collective activity? It can be either; individuals and groups alike can engage in reflective practice around their work. Whether you choose to learn from experience at the individual or on a group level depends on your learning agenda. Is an organization interested in documenting the learning embedded in its work over the past several months? If so, the experiences its members focus on and the questions they pursue in their reflection process will be about their collective practice. Is an individual needing to make sense out of a week’s worth of meetings, frustrations, and turning points in order to decide how to proceed with a project? Then she might explore her experience of the significant moments and key issues that are connected to the decision she needs to make.

Individual and collective reflection need not be sequestered from one another—in fact, they can be mutually supportive of each other inside of the same learning process. For example, in a reflection group focused on individual practice, each person takes a turn recounting a key event and getting feedback on analyzing it, naming assumptions, making connections, and formulating critical questions that emerge. In one version of an organizational learning process, each person identifies significant events from the perspective of their role, allowing the group to craft collective learning through exploring the connections across those multiple perspectives.

Each of these reflection processes is oriented differently according to the aim of the specific learning needs, yet each relies on retaining the complexity of the differences in the group. And although both processes are oriented around inquiry into experience in order to learn, each will yield different types of questions. The kinds of questions that emerge from reflection aimed at individual experience tend to relate to the development of practitioner thinking, whereas reflection oriented around collective work often yields questions connected to aligning actions with organizational values and goals.

- **Reflective practice is driven by questions, dialogue, and stories**

Reflective practice is fundamentally structured around inquiry. We tend to recognize the importance of allocating time to reflection when we can see it as a means for gaining visibility on a problem or question we need to answer. To gain visibility, we examine experiences that are relevant to this problem or question. The most powerful “technologies” for examining experience are *stories* (narrative accounts of experience) and *dialogue* (building thinking about experience

out loud). Journaling is similar to dialogue in the case of individual reflection. Stories and dialogue can be effective technologies for the reflective process because they provide cognitively complex and culturally potent systems for conveying the way we think about, feel about, and make connections in experience. By examining the way we have constructed a narrative account about a significant event, it suddenly becomes more possible to observe the

meaning we have taken from that experience and to excavate the underlying qualities that made it significant. By engaging in collective dialogue about a story or a question, we build our understanding of it and locate the significance of that story or question in the larger context of our work. Even when there is not a clear problem or question driving reflection, it is through the exploration of stories and the practice of dialogue that we can unpack the richness of experience, and evaluate which issues emerging from that experience we need to pursue. In deeper forms of reflection, it becomes possible to identify *learning edges*, those questions or issues that an individual or group is seeking to understand in order to advance their work.

- **Blogging**

Another technology that has potential to make electronic portfolios more engaging is the web log or "blogs" as it is known to those who participate in them. A weblog is defined as any web page with content organised according to date.

In the context of an ePortfolio, course tutors, lecturers, clubs and societies could all have their own weblogs which users could view on their "friends" page. Students can share information they've found or ideas they have on a particular subject, as well as the more social messages which may form a compelling reason for them to use the technology to begin with.

Since one of the main goals of a portfolio is reflection on learning, perhaps a blog is a good option, since it can be used as an online reflective journal and an environment that invites collaboration.

7. Teacher's reflection

Reflection is a highly valued attribute of effective teachers. Without the disposition to reflect on their performance, teachers are less likely to improve their practice or to be able to see the links between theory and practice.

Effective teaching depends on the skill of critically reflective thinking. For the effective teacher, each interaction with learners serves as a tool for continuous improvement as the teacher reviews, evaluates and enriches his/her understanding of the experience for future performance.

The written reflection on the teachers' experience should describe the experience, analyze the experience and state the planned impact of the experience on future performance. A well-developed reflection will answer questions such as:

- What was the setting in which the lesson was taught and to whom were the students? When was the lesson taught? What philosophy or research base guided your decisions in preparing the lesson? What were the intended learning outcomes of the lesson?
- What were the essential strengths and weaknesses of the lesson? What specifically might have been changed to improve the delivery of the lesson? What specifically might have been changed to improve the learning outcomes? What were the unintended and unanticipated learning outcomes of the lesson? What factors negatively or positively affected the success of the lesson? What specifically was learned as a result of developing, planning and teaching this lesson? Why is this experience significant to the candidate's preparation as an effective teacher?

- Specifically what should be kept and what should be changed to improve this lesson before teaching it again? What philosophy or research base guided the candidate's decisions regarding changes? Specifically, how should the candidate's learning and growth as result of this experience be used to improve his/her performance in other aspects of his/her teaching and learning?